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SUBJECT: SLOGANS AND GIMMICKS: THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

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11. (U) SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION: Although the streets of Slovakia have been wallpapered in billboards and discarded political pamphlets for months now, the official media campaign opened on May 27. Given the low public interest and overall disillusionment with politics, campaigning has been low key, and parties are keeping their campaigns largely apolitical. Most are distributing trinkets bearing the party's name and/or symbol, including hats, t-shirts, magnets, candies, coffee beans, money pouches, and card games. There are a few new regulations governing the campaign, including a provision that allows televised ads to be aired for a period of twenty-one days, including on the day of the June 17 election. Ten parties, including SDKU, SMK, HZDS, Smer, ANO, and KSS, have paid for the airing of such ads. END SUMMARY.

INDIVIDUAL PARTIES' CAMPAIGNING TECHNIQUES

12. (SBU) Smer (Direction) is leading the polls. Its campaign in Bratislava is fairly quiet, mainly because the party knows that it will not gain much support in the capital. However, Smer leads in local campaigning outside the capital, with its seven vice chairmen touring larger towns and smaller cities around the country, meeting with small groups of students, teachers, police, and workers during the daytime, and holding larger rallies and concerts in the evenings. Smer is among those that will use televised campaign ads to gain voters. The party's slogan is a play on its name: "In the direction of people"; and all billboards feature party chairman Robert Fico or telegenic MP Robert Kalinak. Foreign diplomats have praised its campaign for its simple and direct nature. While it is assumed that Smer is particularly attractive to the younger constituency, we have not yet seen a major effort from the party to encourage young people to vote.

13. (SBU) HZDS (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) has taken a unique approach to its campaign with a cartoon lion and three- or four-line rhymes on its billboards. In a private conversation, HZDS MP Diana Strofova discussed the party's choice of campaign, saying that it was indeed unconventional but nonetheless effective. According to Strofova, the party chose such a route because Slovak voters are tired of political rhetoric. By using non-political images and amusing rhymes, HZDS hopes to encourage voters to ask themselves if they are satisfied with the status-quo, rather than to prod them with politically-charged questions. Although some billboards also feature photos of vice-chairman of parliament and of HZDS Viliam Veteska, the party has attempted to maintain a non-personified campaign, presumably because of HZDS leader Meciar's negative reputation. Strofova said the party has fliers it hands out and newsletters which it sends by mail. The newsletters imitate a Canadian campaign technique, which brings the focus away from politics by including articles such as recipes.

¶4. (U) SDKU-DS (The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party) is relying on its track record of the past eight years during this election campaign, with the slogan: "Slovakia needed reforms. We had the courage to start them."

The party's billboards and campaign brochures feature idyllic backgrounds of families and landscapes, as well as photos of SDKU candidates, with one-liners such as: "Savings will bring better opportunities"; "New investments will strengthen regions"; and "It's about a confident Slovakia in Europe." SDKU's posters make heavy use of one of its most popular cabinet figures, Minister of Labor Iveta Radicova. The party's campaign approach is rather intellectual, targeting Bratislava and Slovakia's second largest city, Kosice, which the party considers to be its other stronghold.

¶5. (U) SMK (The Party of the Hungarian Coalition) has maintained a low profile during the campaign, as its constituency of about 10 percent remains constant among the Hungarian population in Slovakia. Interestingly enough, SMK is also relying on the campaign of its rival SNS (The Slovak Nationalist Party); an active, anti-Hungarian SNS campaign will encourage SMK supporters to vote. SMK's few billboards feature photos of leaders Bugar, Laszlo Miklos, Csaky, and Koteles, on a red, white, and green background, with the slogan (in Hungarian), "We are doing what needs to be done!" in large font and the Slovak translation much smaller below. Most of the campaign brochures are written in Hungarian.

¶6. (U) KDH (The Christian Democratic Movement) is executing a morals-driven campaign, invoking ideals such as decency, regard for principle, and justice. The party has received advice on its campaign from Christian American associates. Its mascot, Bocian Kristian (Christian the Stork), was chosen

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because it is indigenous to Slovakia and symbolizes the family values that KDH advocates: storks are monogamous and both parents care for their young. KDH's billboards feature several different slogans, each referencing moral principles, order, or family. However, the party's principal slogan is: "For a decent life in Slovakia."

¶7. (SBU) SNS (The Slovak Nationalist Party), according to spokesman Rafael Rafaj, is relying on its "non-partisan" stance. Rafaj admitted his party is historically conservative and rightist, but SNS does not like to limit itself with labels. Instead, SNS prides itself on doing what is "beneficial for the Slovak nation." The party has toned down its nationalist slogan from, "Let's vote for a Slovakia without parasites," several years ago, to "A Slovak government for the Slovak people," in 2006. Furthermore, the party is celebrating its one-hundred thirty-fifth anniversary by handing out key-holders with the party's name and eagle symbol and made from, according to Rafaj, the oldest and most durable material on earth: leather. Ironically, SNS leader Jan Slota may have taken a page from Hungarian Fidesz leader Viktor Orban in publicly offering to step aside from party leadership if it would help to attract voters otherwise put off by Slota's erratic behavior. Unfortunately, Slota's macho personality is a vote-getter for about 8 to 9 percent of the Slovak constituency.

¶8. (U) SF (Free Forum) chairwoman Zuzana Martinakova seems as though she is running a modeling campaign rather than an election campaign, with her face plastered on each billboard, brochure, newsletter, and poster. One publication of the party, entitled "Good day, I Am Zuzana Martinakova," features twenty-two pages worth of photos and information about the party chairwoman, including a centerfold called "A Day in the Life of Zuzana Martinakova," with photos of Martinakova (fully-clothed) attending meetings, kissing children, and even weight-lifting. The party's slogans are: "A decent life, here and now! Count on us"; and "If you want change, vote for us!"

¶9. (SBU) ANO (The Alliance of the New Citizen) has made female candidates the center of its campaign. The party's billboards feature photos of these women and the slogan, "Ona? ANO!!!" ("Her? YES!!!") Some of these billboards also highlight different aspects of the liberal party's platform, with one-liners such as: "For registered partnership" (of gay couples), "Stop Vatican treaties" (referring to the Vatican concordat on conscientious objection from earlier this year), "Separation of church and state," "Mandatory English," and "Modern schools, Internet for all." Despite all of the female faces, the public knows that party chairman Pavel Rusko lurks in the background. Following his shameful, forced resignation as the Minister of Economy last fall, the party lost favor with the public and is unlikely to make it into Parliament this election.

¶10. (U) HZD (Movement for Democracy) is relying on its ties to Slovak President and former HZD chairman Ivan Gasparovic in its campaign. Slogans include: "You trust the President, trust us too!" and "The President believes in us. Vote for his program!" The party's billboards each feature one of these two slogans over a background of the Slovak flag and either a group or individual photo of the HZD candidates. The party, however, is not expected to make it into parliament.

THE FACE OF CHANGE OR CHANGING FACES?

¶11. (U) The daily Sme asked professional photographer Lubo Spirko to comment on the giant portraits of leading party figures that stare down on Slovaks from billboards across the country. Spirko said that Fico's photograph looks fairly realistic, although warts have been removed from his face and his lips appear too pale. SNS leader Jan Slota's was the most thoroughly retouched, with the lines on his forehead erased, and his skin color changed. Spirko praised the photographs of SDKU, SMK, and KDH for relatively unretouched, natural-looking politicians with expressions that suit them. He criticized, however, the portraits of ANO MP Eva Cerna and SF leader Zuzana Martinakova, as they both wear expressions that do not match their normal appearances in public. The photograph of HZDS vice-chairman Viliam Veteska, meanwhile, appears too familiar according to Spirko, and makes him look like he is promoting a lottery rather than a political party.

WHO'S SPENT THE MOST?

¶12. (U) The daily Sme recently reported on parties' campaign spending, which had to be reported to the Finance Ministry. SDKU-DS and Smer have spent the greatest amounts, at 24 million SKK (816,326 USD) and 19 million SKK (646,259 USD) respectively, with Free Forum (SF) following at 11 million

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SKK (374,150 USD). Sme reported that these three parties, along with HZDS and KDH, have taken loans to finance their campaigns.

NEW REGULATIONS AFFECT CAMPAIGNING

¶13. (SBU) This year Slovakia witnesses some changes in the broadcasting of political advertisements and the placing of election posters. All parties, including minor ones, must be given equal amounts of speaking time in televised debates -- making it somewhat difficult for organizations like AmCham Slovakia to get to the real issues with the eight top parties likely to win seats in Parliament. According to the polling agency IVO, Slovak voters like televised debates because they are the "best way of making their decision." Another change is the time frame of televised campaign ads, which can now be broadcast over a period of twenty-one days prior to the election, including on the day of the June 17 election. Aside from limitations on duration, there are no limits to the content or to the frequency of these televised ads. The manager of US-owned Markiza, Slovakia's most popular television station, told Ambassador Vallee that this year's

ad messages were "pathetic," and that none of the parties understood how a finely honed message could move voters. As for election posters, municipalities should assign public places where such campaign materials may be posted, and give equal opportunity of representation to all parties.

YOUNG VOTERS ARE NOT A FOCUS THIS ELECTION

¶14. (SBU) In comparison with past Slovak elections, NGOs have done little during this campaign to promote voter turnout among the younger generation. Political parties, on the other hand, have sent representatives to schools to discuss the electoral process and the importance of voting. According to HZDS MP Diana Strofova, individual parties often turn these meetings, which are intended to be non-partisan, into biased campaigns to promote their own issues. As for non-government attempts to promote young voter turnout, there have been few, although Tvoj hlas (Your Voice) has made some efforts. Its website can be found at: www.tvojhlas.sk.
VALLEE